

# Croatian Red Cross in the Homeland Security System

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## Abstract

*The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the Croatian Red Cross, as the national society of the Red Cross in the territory of the Republic of Croatia, has its place and significance within the newly established homeland security system, which gained legitimacy through the Homeland Security System Act of 2017. However, this system requires further development to fulfill its fundamental functions in that system. Furthermore, the paper describes the activities of the Croatian Red Cross as an international organization that operates on unique principles in crisis situations, which make this organization recognizable worldwide. The paper provides personal observations, guidelines, and recommendations from the author regarding the further development of the homeland security system and the Croatian Red Cross as one of its components, which has a wide network of societies and direct interaction with a many of citizens. Through synergistic collaboration and the utilization of comparative advantages of each component that builds the homeland security system, the system becomes a coordination platform that places the individual at its center, develops state resilience in crisis response, and significantly contributes to overall security.*

## Keywords

*Croatian Red Cross, homeland security system, operational forces of the civil protection system, action in crisis situations, Homeland Security System Act*

## Introduction

The world and its dynamics are becoming increasingly complex, with a higher level of interdependence. The world has become an arena of constant conflicts and competitions among state and non-state actors, making it difficult to maintain a state of security, which is one of the fundamental functions of a state. "A nation has security when it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war and is capable of preserving them by war if it is provoked" (Lippmann, 1943).

Although discussions on national security have been as old as the considerations of society and the state, the concept of national security is associated with the work of W. Lippmann's "U.S. Foreign Policy," and it first entered legislative documents in 1947 when the United States introduced the National Security Act (Tatalović, 2006).

"The concept, as well as the need for national security, emerged because the survival of the state and society could no longer be organized solely by organizing and implementing military defense on a certain territory, but states and society had to undertake comprehensive actions to achieve their goals, primarily peace and survival" (Tatalović, 2006).

Security is a social concept and a need characterized by the absence of direct threats to fundamental values, which change over time as the understanding of security itself evolves. As German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967) once said, "Security is not everything, but everything without security is nothing," (Mayer, 1994) and that remains unchanged, while everything changes, becoming more dependent and complex. Therefore, as society develops, various security concepts and systems also evolve. One of the recent concepts related to security is homeland security, which attempts to respond to the security paradigm of the modern world and environment.

The concept of homeland security is not universal, as it appears declaratively in legal documents in a smaller number of countries such as the United States, Croatia, or Germany.

Depending on its geostrategic and geopolitical position and global trends, the task of the Republic of Croatia (RH) as a state is to develop a secure

environment for all citizens. Security, besides being the goal and need of every citizen, is also one of the fundamental values of RH, and as such, it is mentioned multiple times in the Constitution approaches security at a personal level, for example, Article 37: "Everyone is guaranteed security and confidentiality of personal data..." However, the Constitution also defines when the security of the state can take precedence over individual security through legislation. For example, Article 50 states: "Entrepreneurial freedom and property rights can be restricted by law in order to protect the interests and security of the RH, nature, human environment, and human health..." (The Constitution of the RH, NN 05/14)

Ultimately, on July 1, 2013, RH became a full member of the European Union (EU), and based on the legal basis of membership and the transfer of constitutional powers to the Union, it added Article 143 to its Constitution, stating "The Republic of Croatia, based on Article 142 of the Constitution, as a member state of the European Union, participates in the creation of European community in order to ensure lasting peace, freedom, security, and prosperity together with other European countries and to achieve other common goals, in accordance with the fundamental principles and values on which the European Union is based." It is clear from this that security is a common value of all EU member states. (The Constitution of the RH, NN 05/14)

The issue of homeland security in Croatia is directly addressed by only two documents adopted in 2017, the National Security Strategy and the Law on Homeland Security System (NN108/17). The National Security Strategy underwent its revision after more than fifteen years, and in the same year, the Law on Homeland Security System was enacted for the first time (NN108/17). (National Security Strategy, 2017), (Law on Homeland Security System, NN 108/17). More than 150 experts, led by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Croatian Government and the Minister of Defense, Damir Krstičević, worked on these two strategic documents, emphasizing that "the issue of national security is non-partisan and requires the consensus of the entire society because it is in the interest of Croatia and all its citizens" (Government RH, 2017)

In the 2017 National Security Strategy, the need for a homeland security system is defined in official documents dealing with security in Croatia for the first time, with the establishment and development of the homeland security system defined as one of the nine strategic goals for the next period. Following the strategy, the Law on Homeland Security System (NN108/17) came into force in November of the same year. Both documents place significant importance on risk assessment. In the book "National Security of Croatia in the 21st Century," Pokaz emphasizes that risk assessment was the starting point in the development of the homeland security system, which led to the development of a system designed as a platform for interdepartmental and interdisciplinary risk management (Pokaz et al., 2019). Pokaz further states, "...Croatia had a need to formally establish a system in which its components, through their complementary competencies, obligations, functions, and competencies, could effectively carry out all tasks within the framework of managing security risks, with the aim of preserving and strengthening national security... The Law on Homeland Security System is a *conditio sine qua non* when it comes to its establishment. However, it is only the first necessary step towards the establishment, construction, and development of the projected homeland security system" (Pokaz et al., 2019).

On the other hand, in 2021, Barić wrote on this topic, stating, "This is a very short document (only six pages and 22 articles) that did not address any key issues necessary for the establishment and development of the homeland security system. Like the National Security Strategy, the law does not provide any indication of the system's concept and objectives to be achieved. The only thing that can be inferred from the law is that the principle of coordination, rather than integration of the components of the national security system engaged in these tasks, will be applied" (Barić, 2021).

In the foundational provisions of the Law on Homeland Security System (NN 108/2017), the importance and tasks of the homeland security system are emphasized explicitly. It states:

- (1) This Law, to systematically manage security risks of importance to national security and crisis actions, establishes the homeland security system.
- (2) This Law regulates the coordinated actions of the bodies of the homeland security system and the implementation of activities and tasks within the

jurisdiction of the bodies of the homeland security system arising from this Law, relating to the management of security risks and crisis actions (Law on Homeland Security System, NN 108/17).

The system took a step forward by enacting the Law on Homeland Security System, which legally defines the term of crisis for the first time (Article 3 of the Law). However, the problem is that the term is not harmonized with other legislative and sub-legislative acts. As mentioned earlier, the establishment of the homeland security system does not lead to the development of a new system but rather the integration of capabilities of its components (Articles 6 and 7). However, it is unclear why the components of the system in Article 7 are placed under conditional participation. The law explicitly states that "Within the homeland security system, legal persons that are particularly important for defense, protection, and rescue (Croatian Firefighters Association, Croatian Red Cross, Croatian Mountain Rescue Service, etc.), associations originating from the Homeland War, citizen, like other legal entities that, due to their capabilities, can support the homeland security system in implementing activities and tasks related to managing security risks and crisis situations of national importance." Therefore, the fundamental operational forces of the civil protection system have been conditionally involved without a clear answer as to when and under what conditions. By interpreting the Law on Civil Protection, one could argue that they are indirectly mentioned in Article 6 and that their engagement and actions are implied through civil protection. However, the previous practice has been confusing when the engagement of fundamental operational forces was expected based on their own assessment in accordance with legal provisions and public authorities, without additional decisions. Since such decisions also entail a series of other rights, including material ones, it remains to be seen whether this practice will continue during the operations within the homeland security system or if it will be regulated by other documents (standard operating procedures, plans, and/or decisions).

However, after the Law on Homeland Security came into force at the end of 2017, Croatia unfortunately experienced various extraordinary events and disasters (COVID-19 crisis, Zagreb earthquake, Banovina earthquake, floods, Ukrainian crisis, drone crash...) in which the coordination of the

components of the homeland security system was tested, and time will tell how successful it was. Similarly, with each subsequent case, all participants in the system received further confirmation that it is essential to continue developing such a system with an emphasis on the coordinating role, as clearly stated in the law itself.

From a strategic level, it can be said that the legal framework has been provided, clearly defining the purpose of system development. However, the first oversight in the further process of system development was made right at the beginning. The Law itself, in transitional and final provisions, states the following steps to be taken within six months of its enactment: the adoption of a Plan of Standard Operating Procedures (Article 19) and the enactment of Regulations on the criteria and conditions for engaging legal entities (Article 20). However, as it is known, this has not been done so far.

## **Croatian Red Cross**

**Croatian Red Cross (CRC)** has been involved in all significant emergencies that have occurred on the territory of Croatia, from the Homeland War to the present day. It has demonstrated its readiness and continues to act as one of the components of the civil protection system, the former protection and rescue system, in line with its tasks and public responsibilities. Throughout its actions, the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, as well as international influence and support, have never been neglected. Based on this experience, this paper aims to demonstrate that CRC, with its role and significance, has an appropriate place in the newly established homeland security system.

The National Society of CRC, headquartered in Zagreb, coordinates the work of 20 county branches and 111 city branches. Therefore, a total of 131 branches within the CRC, with each society having its legal personality and financial independence. The largest branch is the City Branch of the Red Cross Zagreb, which has the status of both a county and a city branch. Besides the City Branch of Zagreb, a similar situation exists only with the Red Cross Branch Čakovec. Within the Red Cross branches, there are various clubs or sections that do not have legal personality, such as blood donor clubs, youth sections, rescue clubs, and/or intervention teams. (CRC, 2022.)

The work of CRC is managed by the bodies of CRC based on the Law on the Croatian Red Cross (NN 71/10), the Law on Associations (NN 74/14, 70/17), and the Statute of the Croatian Red Cross:

- The Assembly of the society is the highest governing body.
- The President presides over the Assembly and the Main Board.
- Two Vice Presidents.
- The Main Board serves as the executive body responsible for the work between Assembly meetings.
- The Executive President manages the Central Office and is responsible for implementing the activities, tasks, and decisions of CRC. The Executive President is accountable to the Main Board and the Assembly.
- The Supervisory Board oversees the financial and material operations of CRC and reports on its work to the Main Board and the Assembly (Markt, 2021).

One of the specificities of the CRC, compared to other humanitarian organizations, is the public authorities conferred upon it by the Republic of Croatia through the Law on the Croatian Red Cross (NN 71/10, 136/20). The Law regulates public authorities, activities, and financing of the CRC as the national society of the Red Cross within the territory of the RH, as well as the conditions and manner of use and protection of the Red Cross emblem and name.

According to the Law on the Croatian Red Cross (NN 71/10, 136/20), CRC exercises 14 public authorities (under Article 8.), several of which are directly related to crisis operations:

“4. Requests, receives, and distributes humanitarian aid from international organizations and other donors, as well as national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, for the needs in the territory of Croatia in exceptional situations. (Law on the Croatian Red Cross NN 71/10, 136/20)

13. Establishes, trains, and equips teams for performing tasks in case of major natural, ecological, technological, and other disasters resulting in mass casualties, epidemics, and armed conflicts for domestic and international aid



actions. These teams include: situation assessment and activity coordination, first aid, water life-saving, hygiene and epidemiological protection, care for the injured and sick, work in mobile medical stations, social work, psychosocial support to the population, preparation and organization of displaced centers, search services, logistics, provision of drinking water, communication services, technical assistance, and prevention of secondary harm." Furthermore, indirectly, almost all 14 public authorities are connected to one of the phases within crisis operations, from prevention to recovery." (Law on the Croatian Red Cross NN 71/10, 136/20)

In addition to the Law on the Croatian Red Cross (NN 71/10, 136/20), the specific actions of CRC in crisis situations are also regulated by the Law on the Civil Protection System (NN 82/15, 118/18, 31/20), which defines the rights and obligations of state administration, local and regional self-government units, as well as the roles of legal and natural persons in preparedness, prevention, and response to crisis events. According to Article 20. paragraph 1. subparagraph c), CRC operational forces are listed as the operational forces of the civil protection system. Article 29, paragraph 2, states that CRC's operational forces are called the basic operational forces of the civil protection system in major accidents and disasters.

The principles of action, divided into two categories, are defined in Article 7 of the Law on the Civil Protection System. The general principles, which include the principles of humanity and non-discrimination, fully overlap with the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The principles of operational action of the civil protection system – subsidiarity, solidarity, and continuity of action – are also part of the code of action of the Red Cross.

The legal framework for the activities of humanitarian organizations in crisis situations is further defined through several other laws, including the Law on Associations (NN 74/14, 70/17), the Law on Humanitarian Aid (NN 128/10), and the Law on Volunteering (NN 5/07, 22/13, 84/21), as volunteers constitute the basis of CRC's operational forces.

In addition to the laws, the actions of the Red Cross during crisis situations



are regulated and described in various internal acts, among which the following are important:

- Statute of the Croatian Red Cross – the fundamental document that regulates the organization’s structure, relations among levels of organization, certain authorities, and responsibilities, and defines the scope of CRC’s work.
- Regulation on the Organization, Preparation, and Action of CRC in Crisis Situations – establishes the legal framework, principles of action, organization of operational forces, tasks and activities, rights and obligations, and other important issues for action in crisis situations.
- Standard Reserves – a document that plans and recommends the stock status of humanitarian aid and equipment for the operational forces of the Red Cross at the national and county levels, based on risk assessments and previous experience.

## **Role and Significance of the Croatian Red Cross Within the Homeland Security System**

The number of participants in the security risk management process has been increasing over time, and due to the large number of system stakeholders, coordination becomes more complex. As stated by Pokaz et al. (2019), “The same is true for the civil protection system, where management responsibilities become more complex at different levels ... as well as due to the large number of participants, which leads to numerous ambiguities regarding management and coordination.” Moreover, based on the lessons learned, all participants in the operational forces unanimously agree that there has been a lack of effective coordination, which is defined as the subject of the Law in Article 1. While most services have performed their tasks and been active in the field, the “only” thing that was often lacking was information. Almost always, all the necessary components for a response exist, with the required capacities and competencies, but a unified platform is missing through which the response of actors can be coordinated, thereby significantly increasing the effectiveness of the response, and rationalizing

the use of material and human resources. As mentioned earlier, Croatia had a need to establish a homeland security system, and the Law on Homeland Security System was the first and necessary step.

Article 5 of the Law on Homeland Security System defines its purpose through seven paragraphs. The following paragraphs will describe the position of the CRC, define its current capacities, and explore the possibilities for contributions to the development of the homeland security system.

“1. Ensure rational and efficient, coordinated use of existing resources to reduce or eliminate security risks of national importance.” (NN 108/17)

Security is the foundation of a state, and risk management reflects the ability of a state. To reduce or eliminate risks, several prerequisites need to be fulfilled. The first is to identify risks and then have a good understanding of them. Raising awareness among citizens, acquainting them with risks, and ultimately educating them are necessary for reducing or eliminating security risks and ensuring an adequate response in the event of a crisis. This is also connected to the education of specialized personnel, the development of operational capabilities of civil protection system forces, and the involvement of scientific institutions. In line with these goals, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted the Disaster Risk Assessment for Croatia in 2019, which served as the basis for the Disaster Risk Management Strategy until 2030, with the primary objective of strengthening disaster risk management capabilities. The mentioned strategy was adopted in October 2022.

According to the Global Development Research Centre (GDRC), the goal of risk management is to reduce or avoid potential damages and losses, ensure prompt and appropriate assistance to disaster victims, and achieve a fast and effective response.

“The purpose of the Disaster Risk Management Strategy until 2030 is to improve risk management capabilities in every segment, in all sectors and at all levels, for all risks in Croatia, determining priority measures in line with the Risk Assessment. The strategic objectives of the Disaster Risk Management Strategy until 2030 divide the risk management cycle into two parts for ease of implementation: a) activities aimed at reducing disaster risks during the pre-disaster period and after the response phase, and b) activities aimed at

improving disaster management, including strengthening preparedness and response to disasters” (SUROK , 2022).

The CRC has a developed network of 131 Red Cross branches, and there is a hierarchical management system developed at three levels: city, county, and national. Through this system, the CRC has a broad base and direct contact with citizens. (CRC, 2022.)

Education of the population and raising public awareness about risks identified through the Disaster Risk Management Strategy can be easily carried out through the CRC system. The CRC has implemented a range of successful education programs and initiatives and can continue to do so. An additional advantage of the CRC is its direct contact with a large number of proactive populations gathered around local Red Cross societies, where these resources can be easily utilized in various national interest education campaigns that have not been utilized as potential so far.

“2. Strengthen the management function in extraordinary and crisis situations that pose a risk to national security, including crisis situations managed at the level of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and/or the European Union.” (NN108/17)

Within the homeland security system, the CRC can provide part of its staff that is educated and/or experienced in crisis situations, both from previous crises on Croatian territory and through participation in various international missions. The leadership of the Croatian Red Cross’s operational forces often undergoes training and exercises within the framework of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which is well-known and recognized at the international level. This experience and diversity of approaches should be utilized as a benefit within the homeland security system.

Crises and disasters usually do not recognize borders, as we have experienced in recent history (the floods of 2014). By joining the European Union and NATO, CRC work is not finished; on the contrary, we must work on developing leaders and their positioning to become increasingly resilient to security challenges every day.

When setting the strategic goal of Croatia's accession to the EU, Lasić wrote in 1992: "It is important that we do not resemble those blind people mocked by De Gaulle who shouted in parliaments - Europe, Europe, thinking that they had solved all the problems. It is important that we try to determine our possibilities and chances that are currently available as precisely as possible. In order to succeed, we must never forget that Europe is a group of nations who have been playing a merciless and bloody poker game for a thousand years and cannot leave the table." (Lasić, 1992). The same applies today, as the differences between nations have diminished on the surface and are not so evident in everyday peacetime situations. However, during crises, each of these differences comes to the forefront.

One only needs to remember the COVID-19 crisis and the disparities and independence with which European Union member states acted. Therefore, it is extremely important to position ourselves in different positions but also not to forget about the opportunities we currently have.

"3. Enable systematic and coordinated development of capabilities of bodies within the homeland security system."

Systematic development of capabilities is almost always tied to financial resources, which have always been insufficient or very limited, especially for institutions with secondary roles like the CRC. However, despite this, the CRC has managed to build capabilities and modernize through a series of international projects and programs, as well as through EU funds, to be able to operate within the homeland security system according to its tasks. It can be expected that the homeland security system, through its components, will enable systematic development based on rational and efficient measures, with a special emphasis on coordinated risk prioritization and measures to avoid unnecessary duplication.

As an example, we can mention activities related to water rescue. In accordance with its public authority, the Croatian Red Cross leads the Water Rescue and Coastal Environmental Protection Service based on internationally accepted standards. It conducts training courses for lifeguards, instructors, and leaders and has developed capabilities, material resources, and human capacities for active operations in open waters. Over the past 25 years, the

Croatian Red Cross has trained over 4,700 lifeguards and has specialized teams for operating in challenging conditions (according to internal data of the Croatian Red Cross). Additionally, almost all other operational forces have their own teams for operating on or in water (Croatian Mountain Rescue Service, firefighters, police, and the military). However, there is no unified database of trained individuals or existing equipment, and almost every year, all the mentioned forces participate in interventions related to floods. After the initial step of defining what the national-level system encompasses, it would be advisable to network and valorize the education system in this area to direct the most prepared individuals from the system to specific tasks, enable coordinated development of capabilities within the system, and avoid duplicate equipment procurement.

“7. Enable adequate contributions from the public and private sectors and civil society in the protection and strengthening of national security at all levels of the state and society.”

“The Law on Homeland Security System does not define a rigid and closed structure of the homeland security system. It allows all subjects of society and the state, legal and natural persons who have the necessary resources and abilities, to engage in the implementation of activities and tasks.” (Pokaz et al., 2019). The Law on Homeland Security System, through Article 7, defines the composition of the homeland security system, where, among other things, the CRC is listed together with the other two fundamental operational forces of the civil protection system: the Croatian Firefighting Association and the Croatian Mountain Rescue Service. In this regard, the operational forces of the CRC, in accordance with the public authority and the legal framework, see their position and function within the homeland security system.

## **CRC Capacities and Active Operations**

CRC has existing capacities and active operations in line with the Regulation on the Structure, Organization, and Action in Crisis Situations. The operational forces of CRC consist of employees and volunteers organized in staffs, intervention teams, and support teams at the local, county, and national levels.

Currently, there are around 1,500 employees and volunteers deployed in intervention teams. These teams include individuals with specialized training for situation assessment and coordination (first response units), search and rescue tasks, psychosocial support, first aid, logistics, food security, hygiene and water, accommodation, and more. In addition to these teams, there are highly specialized teams such as the Water Rescue Intervention Team for rescue operations in challenging conditions. The support teams make up the largest operational force of CRC and undergo the prescribed basic training and a basic first aid course. They are predominantly composed of volunteers.

Throughout various crisis situations, both national and local, CRC has increased its readiness level and gained experience in providing an adequate response to crisis situations. What has set CRC apart from other operational forces in the system is that it remains active until the end.

The crisis response phase during the incident itself, as well as the recovery phase for CRC's operational forces, lasts significantly longer than for other emergency services in the system. This is why CRC currently has two major ongoing national operations: "Earthquakes," with a focus on the Sisak-Moslavina County, and the "Ukrainian crisis."

Existing capacities have been overstretched and continuously under maximum load for more than three years. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the entire country and activated the entire operational force of the Red Cross branches. In the first year alone, over 72,522 volunteer hours were worked, with around 3,500 volunteers and more than 1,600 employees in the field. The call center received over 85,000 calls and provided over 6,000 psychosocial support services. It is difficult to speak about CRC's indirect impact in the prevention phase before and during the pandemic, but it should be noted that there is almost no public sanitary facility without a CRC poster on proper handwashing.

The active operations in response to the pandemic were further intensified by devastating earthquakes that hit Zagreb and its surroundings in March 2020, as well as the Sisak-Moslavina County, parts of Zagreb County, and Karlovac County in December of the same year.

CRC was one of the first operational forces on the ground during the evacuation and recovery from the destructive earthquakes in Banovina. Currently, it is the last operational force still carrying out daily activities in that area with its volunteers and over 60 employees. The ongoing activities include the collection and distribution of necessary humanitarian aid, the provision of psychosocial support through individual visits and organized workshops tailored to the most vulnerable groups. Additionally, a well sanitization project is being implemented, which has multiple importance in the recovery process. In the initial months, CRC cared for over one hundred thousand beneficiaries, and although the number has decreased over time, it still exceeds 5,000 beneficiaries monthly. In line with its core mission, CRC will remain active on the earthquake-affected area until the last person returns to their home from temporary accommodation.

Due to the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, and in line with the fundamental mission of the Movement, CRC prepared and started receiving displaced persons from Ukraine on February 25, 2022. Currently, CRC is providing care for over 15,000 displaced persons, with the participation of 109 Red Cross branches. Initially, the intervention teams were stationed in three main reception centres: Osijek, Varaždin, and Gospić, and they continue to be present in all collective accommodation facilities organized by local self-government units or civil protection. The activities in the Ukrainian crisis are divided into three areas of operation: 1) Collection and distribution of humanitarian aid, 2) Psychosocial support, and 3) Tracing service.

## **Discussion**

After presenting a review of theoretical facts and knowledge obtained from studying the available literature on this topic, as well as closely following the lectures in the "War School" Ban J. Jelačić" that had connections to it and based on my own experience as a volunteer and later as a professional staff member of the CRC, in the following chapter, I will present my thoughts and observations. I will attempt to highlight some of the challenges that, in my opinion, exist in the development of the homeland security system, as well as the CRC itself. Furthermore, I will try to describe some guidelines for the



future. This is my opinion and is based on the knowledge available to me, my reflections, and my own experience.

First and foremost, I want to say that I have a completely positive, affirmative, and open view of the year 2017 and the processes initiated by the then Deputy Prime Minister for National Security, Damir Krstičević, which pertained to the development of the homeland security system. However, I can also agree with colleagues who, during their lectures and discussions, stated that the first step was taken, but the agility in implementation was lacking. Today, when we retrospectively look at that period, we can find numerous justifications for why this is the case, but I believe that for looking forward, it is currently not overly important. On the contrary, if we want to be wise and extremely proactive – in these crisis years – we need to incorporate them into the ongoing process.

For the continuation of the comprehensive construction of the homeland security system, it is important to work simultaneously in three areas:

1. Strengthening and developing the homeland security system.
2. Strengthening and developing each component of the homeland security system, including the CRC
3. Working on the integration of components into the system and their coordination, to achieve the ultimate goal of the system's development.

All three directions must be pursued persistently, actively, and in parallel because only then can we ensure the rational and efficient utilization of existing resources, reduce, or eliminate certain risks relevant to national security, and effectively manage such a system when an extraordinary event occurs.

### *Strengthening and Developing the Homeland Security System*

The construction and strengthening of the homeland security system is a complex process and an ongoing task. The purpose of the Law on Homeland Security, and dare I say, the purpose of the system itself as defined in

Article 5 of the Law on Homeland Security, will not be achieved until the question of who will implement it is answered. Since the coordination for the homeland security system is a coordinating body and not a managerial or operational one, practice has shown that the system lacks an operational body. According to my knowledge, such an operational body was supposed to be established as a separate state office or within the Office of the National Security Council, but to this day, none of that has been realized in practice.

Currently, there is no Department for Homeland Security within the system, and there is no designated email address or responsible individuals to work with as components of the system and seek guidance for further development.

Furthermore, according to Article 16 of the Law on the Homeland Security System, the Office of the National Security Council is mentioned as a component that provides administrative support to the work of the Coordination for the Homeland Security System. This leaves unclear who is responsible for providing administrative support to the system's work.

Continuing in Article 17 of the same law, it states that "The Office of the National Security Council participates in the development of strategic documents in the field of national security and the homeland security system, as well as in the assessment of national security risks and the determination of priorities in their treatment, and in connection with that, cooperates and provides support to competent state bodies, especially those whose obligations are determined by the law regulating the security protection of critical infrastructure." However, it is not clear who is responsible for these activities and who operationalizes them.

Due to these and similar uncertainties, operationalization has been lacking. The development of the system is hindered by these and similar ambiguities, as well as the inability to amend not only the core Law but also all other Laws that should be regulated and adapted to the contemporary environment, even at the initiative of the Homeland Security system.

The need for the existence of a homeland security system is significant, as demonstrated by past extraordinary events. Even the United States did not adequately respond to the initial challenges placed before them even

five years after the establishment of their system, as evident in the initial mistakes made during the response to Hurricane Katrina. However, these challenges should not shake us; instead, they should create a desire within us to respond precisely through regulations, rules, plans, strategies, and other subordinate acts – specifying who, where, when, how, and why will participate in the development of the homeland security system. When we answer these questions, the integration of components, their coordination, and the response to the next extraordinary event will be of higher quality, and the existence of such a system will be clearer to the public.

## 2. Strengthening and Developing Components of the Homeland Security System - Strengthening and Developing the Croatian Red Cross

Since its inception and early operations during the Croatian War of Independence until today, the CRC has participated in all significant crisis events that have occurred on the territory of Croatia. It has demonstrated its readiness to act as one of the components of the homeland security system in line with its tasks and public authorities. Throughout these operations, the fundamental principles of the Red Cross Movement, as well as international influence and support utilized by the CRC from international sources for its operations in Croatia, have never been neglected.

For the CRC to become a quality and valuable component of the homeland security system in the future, efforts should continue to be made to develop human potential - expanding the network of active participants (staff and volunteers) and enhancing their knowledge to make them even more resilient. Simultaneously, attention should be given to the material resources necessary for crisis response. The development of material resources is based on personal equipment for staff and volunteers to operate in crisis situations, as well as shared equipment needed in such situations, along with stocks of humanitarian aid required for initial response in crisis situations.

In the coming period, the CRC aims to further empower and prepare prominent individuals within city and county teams, as well as establish a National Intervention Team as an elite operational unit in crisis situations, ready to face various challenges in different disasters. (Strategic plan Croatian Red Cross 2023-2027) According to the plan, members of the CRC's

National Intervention Team should undergo additional specialized training, exercises, and assessments to be prepared to provide assistance and respond adequately to any crisis event, not only in Croatia but also in international missions where such aid is needed. The National Intervention Team would consist of up to 50 of the best members from the Intervention Teams of County branches of the CRC, who possess a range of developed capabilities necessary for field operations. (CRC, Strategic plan of the Croatian Red Crisis for the period 2024-2027)

In line with the purpose of the Disaster Risk Management Strategy until 2030, which aims to improve risk management capabilities in all segments and sectors, it is important to focus on the modernization of disaster management through the application of new knowledge and lessons learned. This will ensure that the readiness to respond to disasters is equally effective at the local, regional, and national levels. With its structure and network of branches, the CRC can certainly make a significant contribution to this goal, especially through prevention programs and raising awareness among many citizens about the security challenges and risks we will face in the future. The CRC has a network of 131 branches throughout Croatia, which already engage in a variety of activities in this field. With adequate guidance and synergistic cooperation with other components of the system, many citizens could be reached within a short period, making them more resilient to future challenges.

### ***Integration of Components into the System and Their Coordination***

“The further development of the homeland security system will necessitate the need to amend and supplement certain legal solutions, which will require the active involvement of the Coordination for the Homeland Security System in directing and coordinating this process from all aspects, not just in terms of harmonizing existing legal solutions” (Pokaz et al., 2019). Such a sequence of events will create prerequisites for the development of a platform that manages security risks in a modern, intersectoral, and interdisciplinary manner, along with their associated threats.

By developing such a platform, questions of duplication and parallel development of capabilities among multiple components can be easily addressed. Such a platform can better respond to financial challenges and operate more efficiently and purposefully. The development of such a platform opens the possibility for the establishment of stronger public-private partnerships, with individuals at the centre.

Through such an integrated platform consisting of system components working in a coordinated manner, challenges from previous crises, such as the emergence of a large number of volunteers, associations, and non-governmental organizations that want to participate in the response but lack effective management, can be addressed. From clear strategic objectives set by the Law, the system should derive its activities for operationalization and begin to act within them. In this age of computerization and digitization, I believe that databases of personnel and equipment can be easily developed to centrally manage information about what the system has and what it prioritizes. After that, mechanisms for attracting and retaining people in the homeland security system should be developed, followed by the effective management of knowledge and capabilities within the system, without neglecting the valuable experiences and lessons learned so far.

## **Conclusion**

Security is one of the most complex functions of states. Therefore, as society and the state develop, various security concepts and systems are being developed to respond to known and unknown actors and ensure the security of the state, the nation, and ultimately the individual. One of the latest concepts that attempts to address the changing security paradigm is the Homeland Security system, which is sporadically developing in Western countries. In 2017, Croatia began developing its own Homeland Security system, based on two documents: the National Security Strategy, which recognizes the moment and the need for the development of the homeland security system, and the Law on the Homeland Security System, which provides the system with foundations and legitimacy.

The CRC has participated in all significant extraordinary events that have occurred on the territory of the Republic of Croatia since the Croatian War of Independence until today. Based on this experience, this paper aimed to demonstrate that the CRC, with its role and significance, should have a place in the newly established homeland security system.

During the continuation of the development of the homeland security system, several parallel directions need to be addressed: a) working on the system itself, its subordinate documents, and the operational part of the system; b) working on all components of the system, building and strengthening their capabilities; and c) working on the coordination of components within the system, to avoid duplication of specific capabilities and to prevent neglect or loss of specific capabilities of individual components.

All of this will require legal changes in the future, which should not be avoided but rather seen as a step forward. It is not excluded that there will need to be changes or expansions to the core Law on the Homeland Security System and/or changes and alignment of laws of specific components of the system. Overall, the homeland security system is necessary for Croatia because the threats and risks to which Croatia is constantly exposed require efficient and coordinated actions of all bodies of state administration and legal entities during crisis management.

In the future, the CRC in accordance the strategic plan for the period 2023.-2027. will continue to develop its own capabilities, material resources, and prepare for the challenges of the modern security environment through a wide range of activities. As a component of the system and one of the largest operational forces, based on voluntarism and solidarity, the CRC will empower every individual in our society and thereby contribute to the resilience and readiness of every citizen, ensuring that Croatia continues to be a secure state on the world map.

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## Hrvatski Crveni križ u sustavu domovinske sigurnosti

### Sažetak

*Cilj je ovog rada pokazati da Hrvatski Crveni križ, kao nacionalno društvo Crvenog križa na teritoriju Republike Hrvatske, ima svoje mjesto i značaj unutar novouspostavljenog sustava domovinske sigurnosti, koji je legitimitet stekao donošenjem Zakona o sustavu domovinske sigurnosti 2017. godine. Međutim, ovaj sustav zahtijeva daljnji razvoj kako bi u potpunosti ispunio svoje temeljne funkcije unutar tog sustava. Nadalje, rad opisuje aktivnosti Hrvatskog Crvenog križa kao međunarodne organizacije koja djeluje prema jedinstvenim načelima u kriznim situacijama, što ovu organizaciju čini prepoznatljivom diljem svijeta. Rad donosi osobna zapažanja, smjernice i preporuke autora o daljnjem razvoju sustava domovinske sigurnosti i Hrvatskog Crvenog križa kao jedne od njegovih sastavnica, koja ima široku mrežu društava i izravnu interakciju s brojnim građanima. Sinergijskom suradnjom i korištenjem komparativnih prednosti svake sastavnice koja gradi sustav domovinske sigurnosti, sustav postaje koordinacijska platforma koja u središte stavlja pojedinca, razvija otpornost države u odgovoru na krize i značajno doprinosi ukupnoj sigurnosti.*

### Ključne riječi

*Hrvatski Crveni križ, sustav domovinske sigurnosti, operativne snage sustava civilne zaštite, djelovanje u kriznim situacijama, Zakon o sustavu domovinske sigurnosti*